

Coins

Five Liberty nickels equal a striking sum

By Roger Boye

FOLLOWING ARE the answers to some questions from Tribune readers.

Q — I was listening to the radio the other morning and heard a man speak about coins. He said a certain Liberty nickel was a much sought after coin. As I have several of these nickels, I would like to know what significant markings I should look for. — L.A., Chicago.

A — You probably heard a reference to the famous 1913 Liberty head nickel. The Treasury Department decided to begin producing the Buffalo (Indian-head) nickel in 1913, and to discontinue use of the Liberty head design that had been introduced in 1883.

Almost all 1913 nickels are of the Buffalo variety, but apparently five 1913 Liberty nickels were made at the United States Mint. It is not known why the coins were made (their production had not been authorized), although a popular theory is that some mint employes were trying to amuse themselves.

In 1976, an Atlanta coin store sold one of the five nickels for \$135,000. But don't get your hopes up; all five known specimens are accounted for.

Q — A friend has a penny dated 1975-D. A small map is engraved above the date, and the design of the Liberty Bell appears above the word "Liberty." It's beautiful. Can you tell me something about it? Does it have good value? — E.H., Chicago.

A — Images of maps, the Liberty Bell, or John Kennedy's profile are stamped into Lincoln cents (and sometimes other coins) by private companies. Most collectors consider such

coins gimmicks, and they have no numismatic value.

Q — While in Florida in 1970, I got a roll of brand-new 1969 pennies from a bank. Recently, I discovered that one of the coins looks very odd. Instead of being entirely copper, it has silver on the front and back sides, and copper only in the middle. Also, it seems lighter than a normal penny, and the edge is cut in an unusual way. I'm interested in knowing its value. — R.K., Franklin Park.

A — You probably have a cent that was minted (in error, of course) on a "planchet" meant for a dime. (A planchet is the blank disk on which the coin's design is stamped.) If so, the front and back sides are not silver, but a nickel alloy that looks like silver.

Such "wrong metal" errors are quite valuable, although it is difficult to estimate a precise dollar amount because error coins aren't sold regularly. But before you start thanking your lucky stars, have the coin checked by an expert. The supposed error could also be the result of work by an overzealous chemistry student.

Q — I have a 1964 Kennedy half-dollar with two "head" sides. I would appreciate knowing if it has any value. — R.G., Chicago.

A — The answer to this often-asked question is simple: It is impossible for the U. S. Mint to make a two-headed or two-tailed coin. You have a fake that is not worth anything to a collector.

Questions about coins and collecting? Send them to me, in care of Room 414, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Av., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Please do not send coins and enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply.